Prof. dr. Ahmet Alibašić školovao se u Kuala Lumpuru i Sarajevu. Trenutno je vanredni profesor na Fakultetu islamskih nauka Univerziteta u Sarajevu, te predaje kurseve islamske kulture i civilizacije. Također vodi Centar za napredne studije u Sarajevu i aktivno sudjeluje u međureligijskom dijalogu.

Napisao je knjigu o islamskoj opoziciji u arapskom svijetu, više članaka i uredio knjige koje se bave islamom u Evropi, ljudskim pravima u islamu i muslimanskom svijetu, te odnosima crkve i države. Jedan je od urednika Godišnjaka Muslimani u Evropi i časopisa Muslims in Europe (Brill, 2009/2016 do danas). Također, od 2003. godine do danas član je i redakcije revije Novi Muallim – Bosanskohercegovački muslimanski pedagoški časopis (Sarajevo, BiH).

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Ahmet ALIBAŠIĆ

**NI NASILNI, NI UMJERENI, VEĆ OSNAŽENI ISLAM**

**NEITHER VIOLENT NOR DOCILE, BUT AN EMPOWERED ISLAM**
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The Serbian Patriarch Irinej is not the only one who thinks that Muslims “when they are fewer in number, they are able to behave themselves and to be proper. As soon as they become equal in number, they dare to raise their heads; once they become superior and powerful, they exert pressure either for others to move out or for others to join them.”¹ It is a widespread prejudice (or rather conscious imputation) that Muslims do not know how to conduct themselves when they are a majority, when they are powerful, when they are in power. The work that we are reviewing claims the opposite to be true. Muslims are corrupted by powerlessness, not by power (138, 261 of the English edition). Islam has always been a political, public, worldly, i.e. secular religion, from day one. Its political involvement is neither abusive nor distorting. On the contrary, its being originally a political religion hinders its political abuse. Islam originally teaches that public religious engagement not only makes sense but that, without it, religion can hardly make sense: “The Qur’an transfers moral concerns found in private ethics to politics so that social justice becomes the paradigmatic public cause—no longer private concern of charitable organizations” (238); “The morally constrained employment of power is an intrinsic demand of all-encompassing faith, not a lapse from an initial integrity necessitated by later recalcitrant events” (250). The Qur’an calls for social and economic justice, respect for learning and personal moral excellence (257). Therefore, the terms “Islamism” and “Islamist” are a hoax. When have you ever heard about “Christianism”? (4). However, there are religions, private religions that, when public and engaged, betray their original nature because they do not believe in their principles that it makes sense to make an effort to repair this world (240).

The Muslim problem with powerlessness is that Islam has been understood and interpreted as a religion of power for centuries. Muslims have developed theology of power (8). However, for three centuries, Muslims have been living powerless while continuing to read literature that addresses them as being in a position of power. It frustrates them in a way that powerlessness does not frustrate other powerless communities. Contrary to members of private religions, Muslims were better off when they were powerful: A weak Islam gave us terrorism; a strong Islam shall give us peace and mutual tolerance on equal terms. (268).

Powerlessness is not the only problem for modern Muslims. They are deprived and denied the right to power from both the West and those who rule them. Faced with powerlessness and the deprivation of power, some Muslims and Ulama agree to passivity, i.e. surrender (248). Others turn to aggression, violence (247), claiming that the violence is originally Islamic. Insofar as this violence can be understood, it is neither Islamic nor will it produce the desired results. Akhtar set out to help Muslims “move graciously from their imperial past to a modest role in the power structures of a world in which their aspirations, even lives and property, mean little” (2-3). This new formula is a non-imperial but still empowered, representative, self-contained Islam that fights injustice everywhere (260) versus a domesticated and privatized Islam (12) as a private source of comfort and another option for self-help in the spiritual market (9). Empowered Islam is legitimate (260) and this is what ordinary and sinful Muslims, who are the primary interest of the author, wish but fail to articulate. It is legitimate for Muslims to determine their own destiny as other nations determine their own destinies. They consider the instinctively and justifiably the submissive, pacifist, politically impotent, ‘moderate’ Islam to be a betrayal of the true nature of Islam. Unfortunately, instead of acting affirmatively, assertively and decisively in affect, they act aggressively and violently. Muslims cannot afford such a mistake in today’s world because “Muslims cannot win in the sphere of physical power” (239).

Akhtar dispels many myths, not just the one about the corruptibility of power. Islam is, he says, an anti-

fatalistic religion. Islam demands rebellion: “Things are so bad that something must be done about it” (240–1). Elaborating on the “revolutionary potential” of Islam (cf. Abdurrahim Muddathir), the author sees the Friday prayer as a revolutionary gathering and a threat to corrupt rulers (240). In fact, the whole book is a detailed guide to understanding the hadith (which is not mentioned in the book) “A strong believer is better and more dear to God than a weak believer, and in each one there is good”.

Similar to Abdelwahab El-Affendi (ʿAbdulwahāb Al-Afandī), the author has a special message for those Muslim intellectuals who have the ambition to reform Islam: “Only a Muslim reformer who argues for strengthening Islam, not emasculating it, carries any weight with ordinary Muslims both in the East and West... Protestant reformers showed that they were more truly conservative and committed Christians than their Catholic opponents“ (2).

The main part of the book is devoted to the elaboration of ten characteristics of Islam. Some of these are standard (mission, book, universality, ethics, rationality, privacy) for religions. Some, however, are specific to Islam: political, legal and imperial. It would be too ambitious to try to present this original “decimal” characterization of Islam in a few paragraphs, so we will refrain from it.

The reader will be greatly mistaken to think that he/ she now knows what Akhtar’s book is all about. Simply, this is such a condensed reading that it does not allow compression. Each page is full of deep thought that can only be further explained, rather than summarized. In fact, the main idea of the book is so consequent and gradually developed, but also strongly and, occasionally, radically expressed that it makes it easily misunderstood if read selectively, despite the clear conclusion that powerful Islam today should not be dominant and hegemonic, but rather an Islam that is engaged for justice and prosperity: “Muslim activism does not envisage theocratic fascism... the lust to institutionalize revealed certainties is the shortest route to fascism. Universal democracy is compatible with modern Islam but not with Western imperialism” (254).

Akhtar’s thought is confident, assertive, politically incorrect, and spares no one. Stylistically, the book is brilliantly written and masterfully translated. It is not a custom in presentations, but I find it appropriate to bring in a quote more than try in vain to go beyond the author in a statement. Referring to the absence of original theology in Islam, he writes: “We are permitted to know what we need to know, not to know everything we wish to know” (6). Elsewhere it says: The fear of this just faith is the greatest irrational phobia in the age of reason (239); The religious universality of Muhammad’s mission justifies its political and legal repercussions, not the other way around (9); The increase in the number of mosques today, which is taken as evidence that Islam is the fastest growing religion, is in fact evidence of ethnic sectarianism and disunity of the Ummah (237); a corrupt elite without a people’s mandate, actively supports the West in the name of national security and global stability, which is a euphemism for Western economic, political and military hegemony (243); The Arabs will run out of oil and cash; they will not run out of Islam, their real wealth and only enduring contribution to the world’s stock of moral, aesthetic and spiritual meaning (245); Lasting peace between Islam and the West is possible ... only if Muslims are treated with dignity as equals (246); Muslims want to live with the West, not under it (246); Islamic unity is bad news only for those who want to maintain unjust universal hegemony (261); In peace time, sons bury their fathers; in war, fathers bury their sons (264); To reject the resistance to evil means to vote for the triumph of oppression (265); A falling camel draws many knives, says the Bedouin proverb. One must not be weak so that weakness does not tempt the unjust (265); Here we only note the irony of (Western) civilization in which peace awards are sponsored by gunpowder traders (266); Unless taken with the right intention, nonviolence is a lofty word for cowardice (266); Today we go to the West no matter where we go (268); The Qur’an is much less critical of the Jews than their own prophets from the middle part of the Hebrew Bible (269); The choice of this politically indifferent Islam is itself fraught with political consequences. This is not a politically neutral, but a neutralized Islam. These
writers are shaping Islam that fits the interests of the ubiquitous West, which is not exactly an innocent or neutral thing (269-70).

This analysis-appeal as a contribution to the Islamic theology of liberation comes at a difficult, i.e. the right time. However, this also means that there is a good chance it will be misunderstood by the powerless, and justly understood and rejected by the powerful. Whatever may happen with Muslims in the coming decades, it is justified to expect Islam to remain a religious superpower (244) because the right to freedom and self-determination of Muslim nations conflicts only with Western interests, not with declared Western ideals (244). Moreover, whatever one thinks about this book, I can agree with its conclusion: “Without a just peace, Westerners and Muslims shall both remain, in both senses, prisoners of war” (272).